

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1953

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Rachel W. Coffin, Editor

Week of March 16, 1953

1953 PRODUCTIONS Premieres in Other Years

*Original Reviews Appeared
In These Volumes*

1952 Vol.	Page
<i>Stage Play</i>	
Bernardine	231
*Children's Hour (The)	151
Deep Blue Sea (The)	207
*Dial M for Murder	215
*Evening with Beatrice Lillie (An)	254
Male Animal (The)	297
Mrs. McThing	359
My Darlin' Aida	218
*New Faces of 1952	278
*Pal Joey	398
*Seven Year Itch (The)	186
*Time of the Cuckoo (The)	235
*Time Out for Ginger	177
Two's Company	157
Whistler's Grandmother	160
*Wish You Were Here	266
1951 Vol.	
*Fourposter (The)	190
*King and I (The)	304
*Moon Is Blue (The)	322
1950 Vol.	
*Guys and Dolls	185
1949 Vol.	
*South Pacific	312

*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled
to play week of March 16, 1953

1953 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1953

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	Page
Bat (The)	390
Be Your Age	397
*Crucible (The)	383
Emperor's Clothes (The)	368
*Fifth Season (The)	380
*Hazel Flagg	362
*John Brown's Body	358
*Love of Four Colonels (The)	394
Love's Labour's Lost	372
Maggie	351
*Merchant of Venice (The)	340
*Mid-Summer	386
*Misalliance	354
*My 3 Angels	334
*On Borrowed Time	365
*Picnic	348
*Porgy and Bess	337
Touchstone	375
*Wonderful Town	344

Theatre Openings

"Porgy and Bess" "My 3 Angels"
"The Merchant of Venice"

*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of March 16, 1953

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"My 3 Angels"

DAILY NEWS

March 12, 1953

'My 3 Angels' a Smooth, Engaging Comedy With Delightful Company

By JOHN CHAPMAN

From a French comedy by Albert Husson, the Spewacks, Bella and Sam, have made an engaging and pleasantly preposterous comedy called "My Three Angels." Its first performance at the Morosco Theatre last evening was a slick piece of funny business by a cast headed by Walter Slezak and directed by Jose Ferrer.

Husson and the Spewacks have contrived a yarn about three French convicts—an embezzler and two murderers—who have been banished to a penal colony in French Guiana—who are the most amiable and resourceful do-gooders imaginable. They have been called in to repair the roof of a house occupied by a hopelessly incompetent but lovable shopkeeper. Since everything is made of bamboo in Cayenne, French Guiana—or, anyhow, scenic designer Boris Aronson has built a lovely house of bamboo—it is not difficult for the convicts to listen in on the troubles of the shopkeeper and his wife and pretty daughter.

Busy Fellows.

The two killers and the embezzler, with a suavity and practicality

known only to the French, proceed to straighten out all the troubles. In order to solve all the family's problems, the trio at one time or another do the following: Prevent the daughter from suicide over a disappointment in love; steal a chicken, a tree and orchids from the Governor's garden for Christmas dinner; vastly increase the sales of the shop; arrange the deaths of two unwanted gentlemen in a most delicate and foolproof manner; and forge a will which gives the poor little shopkeeper the riches he deserves.

"My Three Angels" is frankly a fable for the theatre, and it is delightful. The author's humor ranges happily from the farcical to the ply, and the cast is com-

pletely ingratiating. Slezak, who has been away from here too long a time, is a most likable and artful comedian, and his impersonation of a warm-hearted stock swindler is something to be fondly remembered.

Deadly Serious.

His fellow conspirators—Jerome Cowan as a man who strangled his wife for good and sufficient reason, and Darren McGavin, who crooked his stingy uncle with a poker—are in similar fine fettle. They all go about their farcical business with such seriousness, such earnestness, that one simply has to believe them and be for them.

Another amusing performance is by William Kuluva as the woolly-minded shopkeeper, and Henry Daniell is perfect as the villain of the piece—certainly the meanest man since Scrooge, and thoroughly deserving of his artfully deserved demise. Deserving, too, is Robert Carroll, who, as Daniell's nephew, has trifled with a young girl's

"MY 3 ANGELS"

Comedy by Sam and Bella Spewack; based on "La Cuisine des Anges" by Albert Husson; staged by Jose Ferrer; setting by Boris Aronson; costumes by Lucinda Ballard; presented by Saint Subber, Rita Allen and Archie Thomson at the Morosco Theatre, March 11, 1953. The cast:

Felix Ducotel.....Will Kuluva
Emile Ducotel...Carmen Mathews
Native Boy.....Arthur Dilks
Marie Louise Ducotel.....Joan Chandler
Joan Chandler
Mme. Parole...Nan McFarland
Joseph.....Walter Slezak
Jules.....Jerome Cowan
Alfred.....Darren McGavin
Henri Trochard...Henry Daniell
Paul.....Robert Carroll
Lieutenant.....Eric Fleming

affections and thus meets the disapproval of the high-minded convicts.

There also are nice performances by Joan Chandler as the girl, Carmen Mathews as her mother and Nan McFarland as a non-paying shop patron. "My Three Angels" is a good Spring tonic; it's easy to take and will make you feel better.

Journal American

March 12, 1953

A Brilliant Cast And Sure-Pop Hit

By JOHN McCLAIN

WHEN you see it done well it all seems so ingenious and simple. You take a conventional idea (borrowed, new or blue, it doesn't matter), you endow it with a bright and sometimes brilliant cast, a director of established merit, a tasteful and tolerant producer, and you come up with a sure-pop hit like "My 3 Angels," which opened at the Morosco Theatre last night.

But when you begin wondering why it doesn't happen every evening on Broadway you appreciate the debt you owe Sam and Bella Spewack, who are responsible for the deft adaptation of an original French play by Albert Husson; and Jose Ferrer, who presumably merged the ideas and personalities into a comprehensive unit, and Saint-Subber, who had the perseverance to dig up the dough and put it properly to work.

Not forgetting for a second the contribution of Walter Slezak, Jerome Cowan, Henry Daniell and the various other members of the acting company who performed with such singular distinction. Or Boris Aronson and Lucinda Ballard, with his set and her costumes.

In this instance the Spewacks have attacked the idea (borrowed, and certainly not new)

of transforming a sinner into a saint for the purpose of bringing justice to an innocent bystander. Right away you have a good situation.

Walter Slezak, Jerome Cowan and Darren McGavin are three convicts from Devil's Island who are rather improbably farmed out to do some work for a merchant in the business section of the island upon which the penal colony is located.

They are thus privileged to discover the problems of the family, and it seems that an old meanie is about to foreclose the mortgage and also disrupt the marriage of their darling daughter.

Workable Idea

In their singularly direct manner the convicts hold court and decide that it is time they take the law into their own soiled hands.

The offending character is thereupon ingeniously dispatched and, after a series of further complications, it is generally agreed that those remaining will live happily ever after.

This meagre outline is enough to prove that there is no great moral to be learned. It is a wisp of an idea, but highly workable. The elements of

humor are endless and both the director and the authors have exploited them wonderfully well.

A crime committed by criminals who have nothing to lose is funny, so is the anticipation and the suspense until the dire deed is discovered. All this is given professional consideration.

Bouncy Quality

Walter Slezak has never had such an opportunity as the benevolent convict-in-chief nor has he ever emerged with such merit. He exudes a lovable, bouncy quality that should make most of us eat our calorie charts.

Although somewhat overshadowed by Slezak, Jerome Cowan comes through after all these years in a couple of re-sounding scenes, and there are also highly gratifying performances by Henry Daniell (who has never been meaner), Will Kuluva and Carmen Mathews, as the beleaguered couple; Joan Chandler, as their daughter, and Robert Carroll, Darren McGavin and Nan McFarland, to complete the rest of the cast.

"My 3 Angels" isn't trying to prove anything except that it can make you laugh. In that it succeeds.

"My 3 Angels"—continued

The New York Times

March 12, 1953

Walter Slezak in 'My 3 Angels,' Adapted by the Spewacks From a French Play

By BROOKS ATKINSON

If everyone were a Frenchman "My 3 Angels" would be celestial entertainment. This is the comedy that Sam and Bella Spewack have adapted from Albert Husson's "La Cuisine des Anges." With Walter Slezak mincing comically through the leading part, it opened at the Morosco last evening under the direction of that protean man of the theatre, Jose Ferrer. It begins hilariously in a bubbling Gallic style. In the last two acts it becomes Americanized, embracing

closer and closer the wrong nationality for the kind of folly it cultivates.

In the heat of Cayenne, French Guiana, a French father, mother and daughter are trying to make an honest living. Surrounded with French convicts, this is simpler than you might suppose. For the three angels of the title are three affable convicts, two of whom are serving for life for murder, the third of whom is serving twenty years for exceptional business enterprise, but all of whom are benefactors and idealists.

Father is in trouble with Henri Trochard for mismanaging the business. Daughter is in love with his nephew, Paul, who wants to marry a much richer girl. "My 3 Angels" is the story of how the convicts, pooling their professional skills, eliminate Henri and Paul from human society and lay the groundwork for happy days. Being without scruple the convicts can

afford to be ruthless with evil people and kind to the good.

All this begins very wittily. For the adaptors have written the first act with the wicked insouciance of expert comedians. And Mr. Slezak brings a roly-poly droolery to the proceedings that is highly entertaining. In the years during his confinement in Hollywood he has grown fat and jolly, but he plays with a wonderfully light touch. He is ably abetted by Jerome Cowan as an unprincipled philosopher of crime and Darren McGavin as an amiable felon of tenderer years. Taking the humor wherever they find it, these three actors make the first act of "My 3 Angels" fresh and funny, and never literal.

But then the homely honesty of our American traditions begins to intrude on "My 3 Angels," and things become a good deal duller. As Henri Trochard, Henry Daniell looks like a real scoundrel, and not a comic counterpart thereof; as his infamous nephew, Robert

Carroll plays as though he meant it. The Spewacks are less inventive in the second two acts, but so is the performance. For Mr. Ferrer's style of direction is less gay after he has established the comic mood in the first scenes.

Even in the less spontaneous parts of the evening, "My 3 Angels" still looks gay. Boris Aronson, in his most tropical mood, has designed a mat-and-bamboo house that invites pleasant insanity. And most of the actors are still in good spirits. As the slow-witted father, Will Kuluva's plodding style and look of incredulity are amusing. Carmen Mathews applies a delightful attitude of disbelief to her scenes as the mother; and Joan Chandler, as the daughter, is pretty and wide-eyed enough for roguery in any language.

Nor does Mr. Slezak let the authors down. His comic uncion is always droll. But routine American play-making overcomes an uproariously skittish idea after the Spewacks get their situation stated.

Daily Mirror

March 12, 1953

'My 3 Angels' a Wonderful New Hit At Morosco

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Saint Subber, Rita Allen and Archie Thomson brought a riotously funny comedy called "My 3 Angels" to the Morosco Theatre last evening. The new arrival was penned by Sam and Bella Spewack, and based on a French original by Albert Husson. Jose Ferrer has lent his magical touch to the production as director.

Though "My 3 Angels" is Gallic in spirit, it is just a little reminiscent materially of "Arsenic and Old Lace." For it has to do with three convicts in French Guiana who arrange a couple of murders in the interest of what they consider to be justice and decency.

IT TAKES GREAT craftsmanship to make murder amusing,

or even palatable, but the Spewacks have achieved the tour de force with ingratiating success. Their trio of angelic rogues is well-meaning and likable. Their methods are rough, but their hearts are in the right place.

They liquidate villains to save the happiness of a kindly but ineffectual shopkeeper and his family. They aid a romantic girl to find the proper suitor.

As the shrewdest of them put it: "When others commit an outrage it's an outrage; when we commit an outrage it's justice." And in our book, hilarious.

Walter Slezak has been reclaimed from Hollywood to give the most warming and winning performance of his career as the master mind of the picaresque three. Jerome Cowan and Darren McGavin are perfect as his associates in benign mayhem. Carmen Mathews, Henry Daniell, Will Kuluva, Joan Chandler, Robert Carroll, Nan McFarland and Eric Fleming are excellent in other roles.

Boris Aronson has designed a tropical setting so atmospheric as almost to make you feel the dank heat of Cayenne, while Lucinda Ballard's costumes catch the period and the mood effectively.

FROM THE RISE of the curtain till its final fall, "My 3 Angels" had the first-nighters roaring delightedly. We haven't heard

more robust, spontaneous, appreciative laughter and applause all season. And it was eminently deserved. For here is a wonderful new hit to grace Broadway.

The Spewacks have typed their script with persuasive wit and unorthodox wisdom. They set themselves an almost impossible task and accomplished it brilliantly. They have blended humor, drama and suspense into a solid click.

Director Ferrer has matched their skill. He has shown an unerring eye in casting the comedy, and admirable resource in getting fine contributions from all members of the company. Particularly Slezak. He's nothing less than magnificent.

We advise you to rush immediately to the Morosco for your reservations. They'll be hard to come by if you wait too long. We predict that "My 3 Angels" will be a top ticket by the time you read this.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

March 12, 1953

'My 3 Angels'

By WALTER F. KERN

THE three angels from whom all blessings flow at the Morosco are Walter Slezak, a shy and monklike soul with a tidy talent for embellishment; Jerome Cowan, a fatherly figure who rather regrets murdering his wife; and Darren McGavin, a handsome young romantic who has had the misfortune to do away with his inconsiderately penurious uncle.

At the moment these sweetly benevolent figures are doing time in a French Guiana penal colony, and they have been put to work

repairing the roof of M. Duotel's general store. As they quite literally descend from the heavens, they find the Duotel family in a sorry way. Papa is about to have his store taken away from him by a grasping relative, and daughter is about to lose her equally grasping fiancé.

It is all too much for such sensitive spirits as these, and they immediately set about restoring righteousness and virtue to a

callous world. In the process, they are not only willing to doctor the store's books, to snatch fowl for an impoverished dinner table, and to bait a trap for the girl's reluctant lover. They are perfectly prepared, if need be, to gently and tastefully dispatch the villain of the piece to his eternal reward. Whatever the cost, the Duotels must have a happy Christmas.

Samuel and Bella Spewack have adapted this amiably macabre fairy-tale from the French of Albert Husson, and Jose Ferrer has directed its murderous whimsies with a thoroughly engaging nonchalance. A good bit of the evening has a gleefully wicked gleam in its eye. While we are being introduced to our soft-hearted conspirators, while we are watching

them improve the family's financial position with their own "inspired" method of accounting, and even—late in the proceedings—while we listen to them gasp brightly over the expiring form of one of their victims, the casual irony and mocking impudence of "My Three Angels" are altogether fetching.

It must be admitted, though, that the fun is almost entirely lodged in the play's basic idea and that the Spewacks, once they have made that idea plain to us, have not been especially inventive in elaborating on it. Devices are repeated from act to act, the characterizations become a bit paler as time goes on, and there are disturbing hulls as the antic materials make way for some sober last-act sentimentality. The line of the

"My 3 Angels"—continued

play is made clear all too early; the authors hew to it with a minimum of improvisation.

If the evening's inspiration runs somewhat thin, Walter Slezak's impersonation of a modest and punctilious embezzler does not. Mr. Slezak's profound distress at the sort of bookkeeping an honest man goes in for is irresistibly

comic. His little lesson in irregular economics—complete with pointer, graph, and improbable statistics—is enormously funny. And he makes a juicy cartoon as he tenderly reads the last will and testament he has just written for one of his victims.

Jerome Cowan and Darren McGavin are fine fells for the Slezak gentility. Henry Daniell is

a suitably dispensable villain. Will Kuluva and Carmen Matthews give rounded, legitimate performances as the elder Ducotels, and Joan Chandler is pretty and appealing as the girl whose love affairs need a great deal of unorthodox managing. Boris Aronson has provided a light, sunny setting which is just right for a sly and matter-of-fact exercise in polite crime.

"My Three Angels" has such an attractively irreverent point of view that you may find yourself forgiving its lack of comic complexity and its general downhill trend. But the Spewacks have relied a little too much on M. Husson's originality and have been a little too stingy with their own.



New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

March 12, 1953

'My 3 Angels' Stars Convicts With Halos

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"My Three Angels" turns out to be an entirely enchanting evening at the Morosco. A trio of murderers gleefully prescribe good fortune for a modest family in a penal colony.

The play is unpretentious and casual. If you dissect its plot you find a remarkable parallel to some children's fairy tale, where right in disguise triumphs over pompous, self-righteous wrong. The comedy is marked by a delightful comic manner, practical and honest so

that its purity of outlook constantly surprises you.

The only point where the play's grip wavered last night was the start of the third act, right after most of the audience figured it had found Christine Jorgensen in its midst.

Sunny Spell.

The simple tale casts a sunny spell that leaves you feeling good. The angels of the title are good-humored murderers from the

French Guiana convict camp, who are doing some odd jobs for an impractical small storekeeper in Cayenne in 1910.

When the boys find that things are not going too well for the family, they move in, just over Christmas, to set things right. Father is in danger of losing the business he runs so badly, and daughter is about to lose her heart to a penurious prig.

The convicts have a terrifyingly clear way of thinking things directly through to the desired conclusion, now that they are unhampered by normal society's conventions. With the help of their ingenuity, and a friendly poisonous snake, they made it a merry Christmas for everybody in Cayenne, and a fine night for audiences.

Charming Convict.

Walter Slezak is starred as the ringleader of the convict three. His is one of the most genuinely charming and comical performances we have seen around in a long time. His weighty grace, his boyish smile and his witty timing make everything he does a delight. The time comes when you find

yourself laughing, just because you have looked at him.

Jerome Cowan is dryly good-tempered as one of his conspirators who once dispatched his wife because of the way he found her after forgetting to wire her he was on the way home. Darren McGavin is surly and satanic, and oddly romantic as the youngest of the three, and the one most concerned with the welfare of the damsel in distress.

Will Kuluva is warm and futile as the storekeeper, and Carmen Matthews expertly sustains her gentle concern over his future in the role of his wife. Joan Chandler is attractive as the young lady with her heart on her sleeve.

Proper Stiffness.

Robert Carroll plays the handsome threat to her happiness with proper stiffness, and Henry Daniell is relentless in the role of the cruel owner of the store.

Despite its dealing with sudden death and heinous joys, "My Three Angels" is essentially an innocent play.

New York Post

March 12, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr. Devil's Island, Home of Chivalry

The first act of "My 3 Angels," which Sam and Bella Spewack have adapted from Albert Husson's Paris hit, "La Cuisine des Anges," is so freshly engaging that it sets up the highest hopes for an evening of continuous delight. After that happy beginning, unfortunately, the interest and invention run almost steadily downhill. There is, however, a winning and delightful performance in one of the leading roles: by Walter Slezak, with the result that the new comedy, which opened at the Morosco last night, maintains part of its standard of entertainment to the end.

There is, as Americans who saw the triumphant French original have been reporting, something of the quality of the memorable "Arsenic and Old Lace" about "My 3 Angels." It is the cheerfully non-moral saga of a chivalrous trio of convicts from Devil's Island, who have been as-

signed to work in the home of an amiably impractical Cayenne shopkeeper and, finding that their host's daughter is about to be victimized by a pair of unpunished scoundrels, proceed to see that rough justice is done. They are aided in their plans by their little pet, a poisonous snake.

Merry Murder

To succeed in presenting a gay comedy about the merry murder of two disagreeable fellows by a trio of loveable assassins, it is, of course, necessary to arrange for a suspension of the custom-

ary moral values and to create a make-believe world in which murder becomes a charming practice. To a considerable extent the authors and Jose Ferrer, the director, have triumphed in this reasonably difficult enterprise. I think they make a rather grave mistake in being too realistically explicit in one of the killings, but this is not where they chiefly fail.

Their real difficulty is that there simply isn't enough plot invention to carry the story through three acts. "My 3 Angels" is much at its best before the narrative has really got started. The first adventures of the three convicts with their surprised hosts, before the villains have arrived with their nefarious schemes, are thoroughly delightful and offer a warm sort of character humor that is as pleasant as anything the season has had to offer. The decline in interest sets in when the villains prove quite so simple to overcome.

The Angels

It is in the characterizations of the three sentimental killers that the new play is at its happiest,

and here both the authors and the actors deserve praise for their achievements. Mr. Slezak is the most important of the trio, and his portrayal of a gay and benignant swindler, with a noble heart, is a joy even when the story is collapsing at the seams. He can even be a bit coy and remain engaging, which is no small feat. And Jerome Cowan, as a fatherly killer, and Darren McGavin, as a dashing romantic one, are also excellent.

Indeed, the entire cast is of unvarying help. Joan Chandler, as the girl the convicts are protecting, and Will Kuluva and Carmen Matthews, as her helpless parents, represent virtue attractively, while Henry Daniell and Robert Carroll, as the two scoundrels, manage to make murder understandable. There is a good atmospheric set by Boris Aronson, effective costumes by Lucinda Ballard, and vigorous direction by Mr. Ferrer. If only the quality of the first act could have been kept intact, there would have been reason for happiness, but even now the three convicts, themselves, are fun.

"Porgy and Bess"

Journal of the American

March 10, 1953

Great Gershwin —And Lots of It

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE Blevins Davis-Robert Breen production of "Porgy and Bess" which has been trouping over a large segment of the U. S. and Europe the last few years finally came to town and settled down in the Ziegfeld Theatre, where it was unveiled at a "professional opening" yesterday afternoon.

This is a lusty and lustrous effort all around, delivered entirely in operatic medium with a large company of superlative voices rendering the great George Gershwin score.

If any faint fault may be found with the proceedings it would be simply that there's too much of everything: Too many people at too many windows, too much wild rushing about, too much noise.

When the hurricane comes it almost sends the audience running for the storm cellar. There seem to be no delicate shades of emotion; these are either the most madly exuberant or desperately dejected people in the world. At this final curtain the customers are almost as exhausted as the more energetic players.

Ingenius Set

To serve as a setting for DuBose Heyward's tragic story of the love of a crippled Negro beggar for the mistress of a giant stevedore, Wolfgang Roth has devised an ingenious set with more windows and doors than Stuyvesant Village.

Here dwell the people of Catfish Row, with their wild emotional cleavages. Here we see a murder committed, a short time later the residents depart for a religious picnic full of fun and frolic; another day and the hurricane strikes, bringing death to the fishermen of the community.

Here Porgy wins and loses his Bess.

During the more subdued moments special citations should

be given Helen Colbert for her rendition of "Summertime" and the magnificent duet, "Bess, You Is My Woman Now," by Leontyne Price and Leslie Scott, who were playing Porgy and Bess yesterday. Also Helen Thigpen's "My Man's Gone Now."

And for sheer gusto it is doubtful that anybody can approach Cab Calloway, bearing down on "It Ain't Necessarily So," the high moment in a picnic scene which is, again, terribly big and noisy.

Happy Interludes

There are the delightful lesser interludes involving a lawyer who can legally change a woman to a lady; the immortal "I Got Plenty O'Nuttin'" and the sequence in which the detective and the coroner come to an apparently deserted Catfish Row in quest of a witness only to be confused by the same doors and windows being endlessly opened and shut.

In the lead roles I thought both Miss Price and Mr. Scott had excellent voices although I was not overwhelmed by their acting abilities. On the other hand John McCurry, as Crown, the stevedore, did not seem to sing with any great distinction. But old Cab Calloway, who would rather shout than sing, is constantly engaging as Sportin' Life, who winds up with the gal.

The company as a whole operates with the assurance born of their long experience. How-

"PORGY AND BESS"

Folk opera with music by George Gershwin; libretto by DuBose Heyward; lyrics by Mr. Heyward and Ira Gershwin; based on the play "Porgy" by Dorothy and DuBose Heyward; staged by Robert Breen; settings by Wolfgang Roth; costumes by Jed Mace; presented by Blevins Davis and Mr. Breen at the Ziegfeld Theatre, March 9, 1953. The cast: Clara..... Helen Colbert Mingo..... Jerry Lawa Sportin' Life..... Cab Calloway Serena..... Helen Thigpen Jake..... Joseph James Robbins..... Howard Roberts Jim..... Hugh Dilworth or Sherman Sneed Peter..... Joseph Crawford Lily..... Helen Dowdy Maria..... Georgia Burke Porgy..... Leslie Scott or LeVern Hutcherson or Irving Barnes Crown..... John McCurry Annie..... Catherine Ayers Bess..... Leontyne Price or Urylee Leonardos Policeman..... Sam Kasakoff Detective..... Walter Riemer Undertaker..... William Veasey Frazier..... Moses Lamarr Ruby..... Elizabeth Foster Crab Man..... Ray Yeats Policeman..... Willis Daily

ever exhausting, this is great Gershwin, lots and lots of it, and should hence do business.



New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

March 10, 1953

Porgy and Bess' Again Thrill Theatergoers

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Porgy and Bess" will make American theatergoers, knockers and boosters alike, relax and get proud. It is more than 25 years since the play was done, and 18 since the opera had its first premiere on Broadway.

Now this great Gershwin-Heyward work reveals stature and might far beyond anything it seemed to have in the past. The version which opened yesterday is said to be the closest to the original script. Its fresh richness is inherent, and our familiarity with the music multiplies its emotional effect.

It inspires immediate sensuous response, as nothing else in our theater literature, and little, if anything, in grand opera. Where most big musical melodramas concern the rich and powerful, "Porgy and Bess" sings of primitive hearts. Its passions move like arrows. Its scope is free as the wind.

Into Charless Wastes.

The familiar story of crippled Porgy's love for the abandoned Bess has all humanity's conflict. He saves her from the brute power of Crown, kills to keep her, then loses

her to the evil temptations of Sportin' Life. Finally, with love, he pursues her into charless wastes.

This production is big in every sense. When it is gay, it is delirious. When it is pathetic, it wrings your heart, and when it is sombre, it is terrifying. It is impossible to imagine any company in the entire world performing with more rhythmic beat or passion.

Through a hair-raising performance, first honors go to Leontyne Price for a characterization clear in detail to the remotest corners of the Ziegfeld, and for singing that can only be described as heavenly. Leslie Scott plays Porgy with fine authority and great lyrical quality.

A Fabulous Find.

John McCurry, a fabulous find for Crown, is an enormous man who conveys a mighty joy in his own terrorizing. Georgia Burke lends commanding dignity to the story of Catfish Row, and there is a luxury of feminine voices, continually exquisite, in songs by Helen Colbert, Helen Thigpen, Helen Dowdy, Catherine Ayers and Elizabeth Foster.

Cab Calloway's remarkable performance as Sportin' Life makes a vital comment on "Porgy and Bess" as a classic. He easily makes this role with its familiar songs entirely his own. The whole work is clearly open to many details of interpretation without damage.

Robert Breen's staging gives the opera a headlong pace, with broad, daring strokes. Both the wild murders are chilling. The rhythm of the show is unbreakable, but he has happily avoided artificial neatness.

Purpose Crystallized.

In both "Ain't Necessarily So" and "Boat That's Leavin' Soon for New York," he has Calloway direct himself to specific people, whose backs are to the audience, and the purpose of the songs is thus crystallized. If the serpent of Eden ever walked on two legs, he must have looked and behaved just like Calloway.

For Miss Price, the production is a triumph. She moves with grace and purpose, using her body freely for a complete emotional expression.

"Porgy and Bess"—continued

The New York Times

March 10, 1953

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

After its triumphant foreign tour the current version of George Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess" has settled down in the Ziegfeld Theatre, where it opened yesterday afternoon. If any proof were needed that foreign travel enriches a tourist's art, this production brings all the proof anyone needs. It is the fifth "Porgy and Bess" New York has had since the original opening in 1935. It is by odds the best and it is magnificent.

For they have restored a great deal of the music that characterized "Porgy and Bess" as opera when it was first produced and they have also added music never used before. George Gershwin, if

he were alive today, would feel thoroughly vindicated. As a song show "Porgy and Bess" has been delightful during the intervening years. But as an opera with a brilliantly orchestrated score, with recitative and all the operatic shumbo-jumbo, it is a major work of art—a tumultuous evocation of life among some high-spirited, poignant, admirable human beings. It is all Gershwin and it is gold.

Everything about the production has been refreshed. Instead of being squalid, Catfish Alley now has some of the beauty of an entrancing gouache in Wolfgang Roth's excellent setting. What it loses in realism, it gains in warmth. In the direction, Robert Breen has found a number of ways to express drama and character in shutters flung open and banged shut in orchestrated rhythms, and in crowds directed musically.

One more interpolation by the director would be too much. In fact, this production may indeed

be just a bit too ingenious; the hurricane scene, perched high in one corner of the stage, has lost that inner, raffish vitality. It is too remote and too constricted. But no serious objections are being registered here. For the production as a whole is bursting with life. The first act is a masterpiece. The scene on Kittiwah Island is vivid and uproarious.

The acting and the singing are superb. As Bess, Leontyne Price sings with rapture and professional skill and acts with fire and abandon, turning that wayward part into a new person. (She will alternate performances with Urylee Leonardos.) Leslie Scott's Porgy is an eloquent, forceful characterization in both the singing and acting. Strong and decisive, this Porgy transcends his crippled body with an unconquerable manly spirit. (LeVern Hutchinson and Irving Barnes will also play this role.)

Cab Calloway's Sportin' Life is a marvelous creation—heroically

wicked, magnetic, an evil man with the courage of his convictions. John McCurry's towering, overwhelmingly physical Crown sweeps through the play like the primordial beast—a good singer as well as a dark monster. In other parts, Helen Thigpen, Helen Colbert, Moses LaMar, Georgia Burke, Helen Dowdy, Ray Yeates and many others give notable performances.

They all sing and act as though they believed in the validity of what they are doing. The performance is not so much uninhibited as powerfully sincere, expressing the tempestuousness of the music with conviction. The familiar songs are all beautifully sung. But the long, intricate score, which Alexander Smallens conducts with great skill, gives "Porgy and Bess" a sustained exaltation it has not had in recent productions. This is what a theatre classic ought to be—alive in every fiber, full of passion for a theme.

Daily Mirror

March 10, 1953

New 'Porgy and Bess' Has Old Magical Power

By ROBERT COLEMAN

After triumphant engagements outside New York and in Europe, the Blevins Davis-Robert Breen revival of "Porgy and Bess" opened here yesterday afternoon at the Ziegfeld. This special performance was scheduled for critics and actors engaged in other shows.

We have our doubts as to the merits of such a procedure, for the critics had just as difficult a time as usual in getting through the lobby to their seats. And it's hard for a night owl to fall under the spell of illusion in broad daylight.

BUT ONCE THE lights dimmed and the curtain rose, the great American folk opera worked its magic again. The superb George

Gershwin score, the stirring DuBose Heyward book and the evocative Heyward-Ira Gershwin lyrics proved irresistible.

Breen has brought a somewhat new approach to the current production. He has eliminated several scene changes, and restored about 18 minutes to the score. Some of the music has never been heard before. The direction is marvelously detailed and highly active. There's something happening all the time.

This has the advantage of lending speed to the book, though it occasionally appears to overplay the simpler and more

lyrical passages. But it does give enormous drive kaleidoscopic color and infinite variety to an absorbing masterpiece. The cast is outstanding. Even the bits are played and sung to the hilt.

CAB CALLOWAY, famous maestro and father of scat, is a smooth, vivid Sportin' Life. His is a remarkable performance. Leontyne Price sings Bess, who can't resist temptation, superlatively, and acts her with effective fire. William Warfield, fulfilling prior commitments elsewhere, had an able substitute in Leslie Scott, as Porgy.

Todd Duncan was the ideal Porgy. A Porgy who defied comparison. But Scott's interpretation is persuasive and likable. Helen Colbert and Helen Thigpen are wonderful as Clara and Serena. Their fine voices are thrilling to hear. Rousing salutes are also due Georgia Burke, Helen Dowdy, Joseph Crawford, Ray Yeates, John McCurry, Catherine Ayers, Joseph James and Howard Roberts.

Alexander Smallens, who has a monopoly on conducting "Porgy

and Bess," achieved his usual wizardry in the orchestra pit, while Eva Jessye's gorgeous choir proved an admirable complement for the instruments.

WOLFGANG ROTH'S sets are towering and atmospheric. They eliminate lulls, and permit the musical drama to flow, uninterrupted through its hilarious, heart-breaking and tragic episodes. They are from a real artist's easel—but an artist who knows his way about in the theatre. And a bow must go to Jed Mace's costumes.

"Porgy and Bess" has become a classic. Those who know and love it well have their conceptions about its presentation, its characters and their performances. Just as they have set notions about the titans in Shakespeare's works. It is almost an impossibility to please everyone.

"Porgy and Bess" was a triumph in Europe, and it's a triumph here, too. A tremendously exciting revival of a masterpiece.

New York Post

March 10, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Return of 'Porgy and Bess'

George Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess" is one of the glories of the popular American musical theater, and it is no surprise that western Europe has recently reveled in its lyric richness, vitality and excitement. Nothing hereafter to be said in this review of the much-traveled production, which will officially open at the Ziegfeld tonight and we critics were permitted to see at a special performance yesterday afternoon, will even try to dispute the fact that this folk opera, if I may

call it by such a pretentious term, is a treat for the eye and ear.

Let me set down, at the start some of the reasons why "Porgy and Bess" is so cherished and

honored a work and such an accepted national classic. For it, the great and unforgettable Gershwin composed a score that is not only distinguished as a musical entity but contains some of the warmest and loveliest songs that have ever been treasured in popular memory, and which his brother, the oddly unappreciated Ira, brightened with the raciest and most enchanting of lyrics. In addition, the DuBose Heyward libretto has a primitive directness that is both dramatic and authentic.

The current production, too, has several commendable virtues, despite what I am going to say about it a little later on. In the first place, it has had the wisdom to go back to the original Gershwin operatic form, instead of

breaking it up into the combination of straight dialogue and songs that the otherwise admirable revival of 1942 made of it. Furthermore, the producers have properly taken advantage of the fact that this love tragedy of Catfish Row can be a dynamic visual delight, full of rich racial excitement and stirring pictorial beauty.

The trouble is that Robert Breen, who has staged it, has allowed these visual virtues to go to his head. There is an inexorable law of diminishing returns in such matters, and when the stage is so constantly crowded with picturesque performers, all of them acting away for dear life, one begins to long for a bit of repose. The incessant tumultuousness starts to lose its appeal when

"Porgy and Bess"—continued

It becomes clear that the director doesn't appreciate the welcome contrast of occasional quiet. Another dubious result is that the proceedings appear to go on forever.

I was also unhappy yesterday afternoon about the performance of the eminent Cab Calloway as the disreputable Sportin' Life. In past productions, I have seen the

role interpreted by sinuous dancers like Avon Long and John W. Bubbles, who sild with ominous and sinister grace through the part, and that may have had something to do with my dissatisfaction over the mannered and highly-stylized detail with which Mr. Calloway transformed the evil genius of Catfish Row into a showy Broadway performer. And

I thought he wasted such a fine song as "There's a Boat That's Leavin' Soon for New York."

Leslie Scott, who alternates with LeVern Hutcherson, and Leontyne Price, in the title roles, sang splendidly, particularly in the beautiful "Bess, You Is My Woman Now," and minor characterizations were especially well handled by Helen Thigpen, Helen

Dowdy and Ray Yeates. Please make no mistake about it: "Porgy and Bess" is a popular musical masterpiece, with an impressive head start toward immortality, and you can hardly mistake it in the current revival. But I, for one, would have been happier if it weren't so grimly determined to be tumultuous.

DAILY NEWS

March 10, 1953

'Porgy and Bess,' a Work of Art, Given Fine Revival at the Ziegfeld

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Each time "Porgy and Bess" is produced, its stature as a work of art increases. This folk opera by DuBose Heyward and George and Ira Gershwin has been given a stirring and beautiful production by Blevins Davis and Robert Breen at the Ziegfeld Theatre, and yesterday afternoon's first audience, drawn largely from the professional theatre, gave it the ovations it deserved.

Scenically this new production is different from the others. Almost all the action now takes place in the one set of Catfish Row—a very good set by Wolfgang Roth—and this action is almost continuous, blending times and moods at a rather breathless pace. The effect of this streamlining is generally acceptable, even though it does

force director Breen to some lengths in moving his company on and off stage and in having an inordinate amount of opening and closing of shutters on the shanty houses of Catfish Row. During one or two irreverent moments I thought the proceedings on the stage resembled the action in the tavern scene of "Der Rosenkavalier" instead of the movement of a fine American opera.

A Superb Cast.

"Porgy and Bess" needs a superb cast to do it justice, and it has one in this revival. Yesterday's Bess, Leontyne Price, was the best I've seen yet, in acting and singing, too. (She is to share the role with Urylee Leonard.) Yesterday's Porgy, Leslie Scott, was fine, and his duet with Miss Price, "Bess, You Is My Woman Now," was the first of many thrilling moments during the performance. (Scott will share the Porgy role with two other baritones, LeVern Hutcherson and Irving Barnes.)

In the business of finding an ac-

tor for a part—a troublesome thing in the theatre—once in a while a "natural" comes along. The "natural" in "Porgy and Bess" is the casting of Cab Calloway as Sportin' Life. Here is the best of all performances of this character—amusing, slick, graceful and enormously artful. Calloway's singing of "It Ain't Necessarily So" and Breen's staging of the number make one of the most delicious events in today's theatre.

A Work of Art.

There are many other fine acting and singing performances at the Ziegfeld; John McCurry is notable as the villain Crown; there is a particularly amusing impersonation by Moses LaMarr of the divorce-peddling lawyer, and Helen Dowdy is effective as the Strawberry Woman.

Through all of "Porgy and Bess" runs the strength and great musical instinct of George Gershwin. This score is a work of art—and it is being given a most artful interpretation by a fine orchestra under the direction of Alexander Smallens, who has directed all productions of this music show classic.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

March 10, 1953

'Porgy and Bess'

By WALTER F. KERR

THE Blevins Davis-Robert Breen revival of "Porgy and Bess" has now come to the Ziegfeld after whirlwind engagements in Berlin, Vienna, Paris and London, and I am surprised that Berlin, Vienna, Paris and London are still standing.

For this is surely the most restless, urgent and shatteringly explosive production of the Gershwin masterwork we have yet had. The stage is rarely still. As the lights come up slowly on the splintered stairways and sagging shutters of Catfish Row, and as the first strains of "Summertime" cut across the sultry silence of a South Carolina evening, DuBose Heyward's world of frenzied fury and passionate violence begins to take on sinuous, insistent life. Hands, bodies and laughing voices unite in a driving, relentless and finally irresistible rhythm. The theater is supercharged with an almost animal fury, and a flaming Bess strides into a Charleston back alley that teems with raw and racy vitality.

With every step in the familiar narrative—that rueful tale of the crippled "goat boy" who dared hope that the dazzling Bess might be his—the savage beat is intensified. A "Crap Game Fugue" ends in a shrill melee. With the blast of a trumpet announcing a picnic, dozens of shutters crack open like rifle fire. The outing at Kittiwah Island—wherein Sportin' Life delivers "I Ain't Got No Shame" and "It Ain't Necessarily So"—becomes a roaring saturnalia. In the production which Robert Breen has devised, "Porgy and Bess" is an almost uninterrupted series of musical and choreographic detonations, one following the other with the velocity of that hurricane which brings the second act crashing to its climax.

Some electrifying performers infuse this flamboyantly dynamic stage direction with joyous and unflagging energy. Cab Calloway is the new Sportin' Life. With teeth and eyes flashing, he emphatically asserts himself in the

mocking humors of "A Woman Is a Sometime Thing." The huskily whispered insinuations, and the abandoned improvisation, of "It Ain't Necessarily So" are stunning ornaments for an inspired lyric and an unforgettable tune. And when this demonic figure drives into "There's a Boat That's Leavin' Soon for New York," standing with arched and trembling fingers over a weakening Bess, he advances far beyond the aleck comedy usually associated with the role and evokes all of that dramatic and persuasive evil which puts an end to happiness on Catfish Row.

Leontyne Price was the Bess of Monday's premiere—she is one of three alternates appearing in the role—and it would be lunacy to ask for a better one. Her surrender to Porgy (in the duet "Bess, You Is My Woman Now") is deeply affecting; she makes the second-act seduction ("What You Want With Bess") fiercely exciting; and the rueful self-knowledge which she brings to her reunion with the dismayed cripple ("I Loves You, Porgy") is honest and haunting playing.

Leslie Scott's Porgy is almost equally moving. If there are times when Mr. Scott's range does not really encompass the Gershwin score in its full brilliance, the

small losses are more than made up for by the sensitivity with which the part is acted.

Helen Colbert's "Summertime," Helen Thigpen's "Time and Time Again," Helen Dowdy's street cries as The Strawberry Woman, and Moses LaMarr's robust clowning in "Woman to Lady" are all rich and vigorous contributions to an unfailingly rousing performance.

There are, perhaps, some minor penalties incurred by an almost too aggressive determination to keep a familiar script and score from going soft. By the time Mr. Breen reaches the hurricane scene, he has very nearly exhausted the responsiveness of his audience, if not the vigor of his players. (He is further handicapped here by an unhappily crowded playing area.) The effort of making one rip-roaring episode outdo another does threaten to become wearing, to turn an already excited orchestration into an onstage clatter and din. And some of the show's most striking devices—the bang and slap of the tenement shutters, for instance—lose value through repetition.

But this is, very happily, no solemn sample of a musical shrine revisited. The Gershwin score, still bursting with life of its own, has been let erupt all over the Ziegfeld stage. Whatever the incidental excesses, it's a thrilling show.

"The Merchant of Venice"

The New York Times

March 5, 1953

Luther Adler Plays Shylock in 'Merchant of Venice' at the City Center

By BROOKS ATKINSON

"The Merchant of Venice" is an interesting drama and the production that opened at the City Center last evening is interesting, too. Especially in the romantic scenes. For Margaret Phillips is a mettlesome Portia, despite an accent that is not exactly Shakespearean, and Nancy Marchand is a spirited Nerissa. As Jessica, Felicia Monteleagre is light and enchanting, although, again, the accent is not one to enrapture lovers of Shakespeare.

Since "The Merchant of Venice" does not reach the stage frequently in this vicinity, it is fair to point out that Albert Marre has directed an intelligible production that tells the ancient story and makes the trial scene dramatic and portentous. You can hear the lines. Nobody speaks well. But everybody speaks distinctly.

"Interesting," however, it is not a very interesting word to apply to Shakespeare. And now we come hard against the stubborn facts of this production. Luther Adler's

Shylock is hum-drum and colorless. He is blameless. You can find no serious faults in this intelligent man of the Rialto. In the trial scene he does seem to be a little unreasonable, but only because he insists upon logic and reason in the presence of people who are horrified by cause and effect. He screams once at the close of the scene. He exits with some sardonic laughter. But since Mr. Adler has not put any passion into the preliminary parts of the play, Shylock's defeat by the wise young judge does not settle anything that really matters.

There is a great deal more to Shylock than Mr. Adler reveals, and it is not pleasant. For it is idle to pretend that Shakespeare's portrait of the Jew is not contemptuous and scornful. In Elizabethan times orthodox Jews were hated, and, in fact, banned from England. Probably the only Jews Shakespeare knew were Jews who had adopted the Christian religion. The Elizabethan hostility to Jews was not racial but religious.

In the light of modern thought, Shakespeare's attitude toward Shylock is indefensible. But since Shakespeare humanized everything he touched, Shylock is a vivid, complex character—devout, affectionate toward his daughter and the memory of his wife, sensitive, keen-minded and passionate. He has the best mind of anyone in the play, save Portia, perhaps; and since he burns with vitality he brings tremendous life into the midst of a formally romantic play.

Although Mr. Adler's dignified, thoroughly modern interpretation avoids the unpalatable elements in the character, it leaves the play listless. It is hardly more than a polite college exercise. And where is the music? Shylock, an extraordinarily articulate man, has some noble things to say in noble language. Mr. Adler recites them without much conviction. Portia, Lorenzo, even Antonio, have some golden lines to speak. The imagery of parts of "The Merchant of Venice" is magnificent.

Well, the lines are spoken, but not with much beauty. Even Philip Bourneuf, one of the ablest actors in the troupe, does not redeem Antonio from the commonplaceness of his supercilious Venetian soul. Earle Hyman as the eloquent Prince of Morocco introduces a welcome whiff of personality into his casket scene. Michael Wager makes an agreeably young Lorenzo.

But this version of "The Merchant of Venice" is uninspired. It is also unnecessarily remote, for Lemuel Ayers, the scene designer, has separated the performance from the audience by a series of steps and blocks that look like a miniature wall. If Shakespeare's director had put barriers around the stage at the Globe Theatre, his audiences would have felt cut off from the play, as we do now at the City Center.

Since the play is interesting, this competent production is interesting, too. But Shakespeare is

"THE MERCHANT OF VENICE"

Play by William Shakespeare; staged by Albert Marre; settings and costumes by Lemuel Ayers; choreography by Todd Bolender; presented by the New York City Drama Company at New York City Center, March 4, 1953. The cast:

Antonio..... Philip Bourneuf
Salarino..... Earl Montgomery
Salanio..... Paul Sparrer
Bassanio..... Paul Stevens
Lorenzo..... Michael Wager
Gratiano..... James Daly
Portia..... Margaret Phillips
Nerissa..... Nancy Marchand
Neopolitan Prince.....

Richard Astor
English Lord..... Kevin Riley
German Baron.....

Raymond Johnson
Balthazar..... Albert Duclos
Prince of Morocco..... Earle Hyman
Shylock..... Luther Adler
Tubal..... Richard Venture
Jessica..... Felicia Monteleagre
Launcelot Gobbo..... Frank Corsaro
Prince of Arragon.....

Robert Fletcher

not worth playing if the director and actors do not think he is a great poet and dramatist.



New York World-Telegram

The Sun

March 5, 1953

City Center Plays 'Merchant'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS

The NYC Drama Co. is rounding out its spring series of plays at the City Center with "The Merchant of Venice" in a respectable, if not entirely gripping production.

This particular offering is likely to be of more interest to people who are not familiar with the Shakespeare drama than to those who know it well. There has been a good deal of objection to plans for its production in recent years because of its depiction of fierce anti-Semitism. The inclination to tone down this element in the play succeeds only in emasculating the dramatic intention.

The play is a remarkable example of how tragedy and comedy can be mixed by someone who knows how. In this case the romantic and melodramatic aspects of the show are ingeniously inter-

twined. Antonio makes his loan of money, and risks his forfeit of flesh to Shylock, in order for Bassanio to enter a contest for Portia's hand.

Shylock's Show.

When he won, and Antonio is faced with paying up his collateral, it is Portia who saves the day, and condemns Shylock, with her ingenious interpretation of the law.

The backbone of the play, though, is Shylock with his tumultuous passions. The contempt of the Christians for him and his profession of money lending infuriated him. He despises Antonio for his scorn. His heart is broken when his daughter elopes. He is so consumed with hatred that he chooses to take Antonio's life, in preference to the money he loaned.

In the end, of course, he loses everything.

Granted that Shakespeare has stacked every card in the deck against him, Shylock is nothing if not a man of gigantic emotional capacities. He has remarkably few scenes to make his points, so they have to be bravura, even overwhelming, or the problem is artificial.

Tempered Style.

Luther Adler plays Shylock in what seems unreasonably tempered style. He is letting the tumult of the man remain inside him. His agony over Jessica's departure never dominates the revelry around him. The famous speech beginning "To bait fish withal" and containing "Hath not a Jew eyes?" projects as a rhetorical hypothesis rather than wild irony.

This approach to the part may have been intended to give the character more sympathy than the playwright did. Instead it keeps him out of focus. When the conflict comes to a head in the trial scene, Shylock's opponents seem foolish rather than evil. Because you were never shattered by Shylock's needs, you are not moved by his losses.

As Portia, Margaret Phillips continually gives the play style and pace. She is entirely convincing, too, in the transition from her romantic scenes of banter, to the positive drama of the courtroom sequence. The performance is positive and gentle.

Believable Performances.

Philip Bourneuf is both understandable and believable as Antonio, and Paul Stevens makes Bassanio reasonable, and much more than the cutout he so often is. Felicia Monteleagre is beautiful, graceful and gay as Jessica, while her foil, Lorenzo is made youthful and precise by Michael Wager.

James Daly is a lively, mercurial Gratiano, and Nancy Marchand is, decorative and witty as Nerissa.

The production looks deceptively simple on the surface, as it changes slickly from one setting to another without the fall of the curtain.

"The Merchant of Venice"—continued

DAILY NEWS

March 5, 1953

Adler's Shylock Interesting, but City Center's 'Merchant' Is Not

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The New York City Drama company topped off its short season last evening by presenting "The Merchant of Venice" at the City Center. The two preceding productions, "Love's Labor's Lost" and Shaw's "Misalliance," were superior to this one, which strikes me as being choppily assembled, uncertainly staged by Albert Marre and infrequently

illuminating.

Most of the illumination is provided by Luther Adler in the title role. Adler's Shylock is a gentle

and surprisingly believable man with a dry wit and a superior intellect, and I admire the sensibleness with which he plays a thankless and disputatious role.

A "Reading." Mostly.

I have less admiration for Margaret Phillips' interpretation of

Portia; her breathy and hard-toned voice and cold demeanor give little scope to the "quality of mercy" speech. And Philip Bourneuf, who was so artful and amusing as Holofemes in "Love's Labor's Lost," does little more than yell distinctly as Antonio.

There are persuasive minor performances here and there, the most interesting being Nancy Marchand's impersonation of Nerissa, and the stage discloses an attractive flip-flap setting by Lemuel Ayers. But all the good and high-minded people involved in this offering have not managed to pull "The Merchant of Venice" together and make it into a play. It is a "reading"—and several of its minor roles are quite badly read.

New York Post

March 5, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

'The Merchant of Venice' Revived

Whether Shakespeare thought of Shylock as a melodramatic villain or a sympathetic victim of persecution is a fairly academic matter in the face of one undeniable fact: He made him a man, the one flesh-and-blood figure in "The Merchant of Venice," a giant among pygmies, poltroons, clowns, and shadowy females. The tale of caskets, ducats, pounds of flesh and girls disguised as learned attorneys stands or falls by Shylock, and, since he is effectively played by Luther Adler, the production at the City Center last night came to life upon occasions.

But it isn't, save when the baited Jew of Venice is present, a very interesting play any longer, and the staging accorded it lacks the freshness and imagination of the City Center's recent presentation of "Love's Labour's Lost," with the result that it seems to me the least striking of

the three offerings which have been provided for us by Albert Marre's enterprising group. Mr. Marre has directed it with considerable liveliness, and the cast contains a good Shakespearean actor in Philip Bourneuf, but only the Shylock scenes have real vitality.

Pound of Flesh.

There is, I suppose, no particular point in criticising "The Merchant of Venice" as a play after all of these centuries, but one ironical fact about it does come up once more. Despite Mr. Bourneuf's vigorous playing of

the role, the merchant Antonio remains so pallid that Shylock needn't have worried about drawing blood from him in the course of getting his pound of flesh. There just isn't any in him. I don't see how there can be any chance of "The Merchant of Venice" being thought an anti-Semitic drama. There is both good and evil in Shylock, but, as the one living human being amid shadows, he is inevitably the play's hero.

Mr. Adler plays him as somewhat younger than is the custom, and gives him dignity, scorn, intelligence and understandable bitterness. He doesn't strive too earnestly for sympathy and he provides Shylock with a kind of indignant, satirical humor that is believable and effective. I certainly don't think that the performance is one of exceptional distinction, but it has stature and power and it has no trouble in dominating the evening. And there is no doubt that, when Mr. Adler leaves the stage, the interest wanes.

Margaret Phillips

The Portia is Margaret Phillips, who is recognized as one of

the ablest young actresses of the American theater, and there are several pleasant things to be said about her performance. She plays simply, freshly and with humor, and the casket scenes come off rather better than usual. I think, however, that, on the whole, Miss Phillips is just a little too casual about her portrayal, and that there is less style and eloquence than might have been expected of her. Like most current players, she is still a bit happier in realistic drama.

Most of the other portrayals do little to add to the effectiveness of an only moderately stimulating evening, but the reason that the scenes in which the foreign princes try to guess which casket contains Portia's picture take on a certain liveliness is that Earle Hymen, as the Prince of Morocco, and Robert Fletcher, as the Prince of Arragon, bring a sense of authentic character to the roles. The presumably comic part of Launcelot Gobbo has been cut down to virtually nothing, but that is hardly a loss to the proceedings.

Journal of the American

March 5, 1953

Much Missing From Production

By JOHN MCCLAIN

LAST night the New York City Drama Company presented the last of their series for the season, "The Merchant of Venice," by Shakespeare, and in so doing failed to live up to the high promise of their two earlier efforts—"Love's Labour's Lost" and "Misalliance."

The reasons for this would seem to be two-fold. "Merchant" is a diffused and rambling exploration for most of its many scenes; the moments of depth and majesty

are vitiated in small episodes which are often coy without being very funny, or just plain unbelievable.

The play must, therefore, be

given superb production, and the performances should be sufficiently notable to lend some particular excitement to the evening. In this regard I think much was missing.

Pound of Flesh

Luther Adler succeeds in creating a reasonably sympathetic Shylock, but I am the guy that never thought he was meant to be truly sympathetic, or that the greatest actor in the world could quite succeed in making him so.

As I read it, The Bard was shaking a finger at commercial gambling and ostentatious living, pointing out that he who loses must pay with the pound of flesh.

But no matter how this theory is developed, it is still difficult to regard the Shylock as a lovable character and I would be delighted to see him played up to the hilt as a full

fiend. Forget the racial insinuation—call him McClain.

Among the other operators I thought that Philip Bourneuf was a pleasant and audible Antonio, the young man whose heart is going to be quartered, although again I have never understood his rather placid acceptance of his fate.

His friend is offering to pay Shylock three times the debt, in cash, but Antonio practically waves him away with the remonstrance that he'd just as soon be killed and thus spared an old age of poverty.

Portia Irritating

Margaret Phillips may not go down in history as our greatest Portia, although she is extremely bright and decorative, and Nancy Marchand lends the proper comic overtones to the role of Nerissa, her maid.

But once more I find myself